

Featured Articles



Carving Found Wood

Using found wood can be beneficial for the environment, your pocketbook and even your design process. Find out how working with unaltered wood can spark your creativity, where to find suitable pieces, which species to favor and how to incorporate the wood's natural features—burls, knots, insect trails and all—into your carving. [Read more...](#)



Using Plow Planes

If you have a plow plane in your collection and feel like you've made enough grooves to last a lifetime, you may wonder what else you can use it for. Here are some suggestions, plus tips on proper assembly and technique. [Read more...](#)

Sheet Goods: Putting Them In Their Place

Do you like using sheet goods but hate trying to find a place to store them? This storage rack plan will keep them off your floor, make accessing them a breeze and help prevent them from taking over your workspace. [Read more...](#)

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Carving Found Wood

For the past 20 years, I have been carving sculptures exclusively from found wood. It has given me the opportunity to explore my creativity in carving endless forms and sizes of sculpture. Most recently, my work has evolved into carving rooted trees that have suffered weather damage. One of my greatest joys is releasing something unexpected from this wood so that others can see it too.



This carved sugar maple was a gift for the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation.



A closer view of the bear shows how the author created texture by burning the wood.

Found wood can be as simple as a stump from a fallen tree, as complex as a burl, or as common as a tree branch. It can be as small as a knot, or as large as a rooted tree.

It's important to gather found wood in a conscientious manner. Use care when exploring delicate bioregions in search of wood sources and remove only what you need—leave the rest to decompose naturally. Familiarize yourself with endangered and rare species in the particular area in which you are seeking found wood and be sure never to upset these. Always ask for permission to remove found wood from private lands or municipally owned areas.

Where to Locate Found Wood

- Farmers' fields: In the region where I live (central Ontario, Canada), farmers' fields have proved a great source of uprooted cedar trees.
- Local woodlands: fallen trees.
- Shorelines: obviously a good source of driftwood. Look for standing trees you may be interested in carving. Keeping the root system intact aids in the fight against shoreline erosion, and the sculpture adds beauty and interest to the shoreline.
- Local arborists can often provide you with, or help you locate, tree burls.
- Any location that has withstood extreme weather conditions. Look for storm-damaged trees.

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Candidate Species

Usable species will vary according to the area in which you live. In my region, I favor the following types of found wood:

- Cedar roots have great potential for showing movement; the numerous offshoots from the heart give a wonderful twisting jaggedness that only nature can provide. Cedar also offers striking colors—even shades of purple appear when you sand down to the inner bark.
- Maple has extremely dense bark, which disguises the intriguing folds and creases that become exposed after it is debarked.
- Walnut, like cedar, offers great color. This dense wood needs extra sanding to remove rogue fibers. Use a sealer between the numerous sanding rounds required to obtain a flawless finish. Be diligent with sanding; if not done properly, fibers will stick out and ruin your finish.
- Ash: I consider this to be the ideal species for rooted tree sculptures, as it has one of the lowest moisture contents.



Carved from a cedar root, Narrow Escape displays wonderful color and a sense of movement.



This loon's head is carved from a root that was underwater, giving it a darker hue. The various tones seen in this piece of found wood add interest to the finished piece.

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Carving Found Wood

Reasons For Using Found Wood

- Environmental factors: lessens the demand for cut and milled trees and promotes creation, rather than destruction.
- Cost efficiency: usually free or can be bought for a minimal fee.
- Sentiment and tradition: consider using a piece of wood from a special family Christmas tree, a family homestead or an historic location to give the sculpture added meaning and provenance.
- Creative considerations: incorporating the wood's natural twists and turns into your project means nature has done some of the design for you. Texture is easily achieved by simply leaving some of the natural bark area exposed. Insects may have left interesting trails and holes behind; these patterns can be incorporated into your design and may inspire eye placement, feathering, etc.

Recommended Tools

- Hammer/chisel: good for debarking
- Lancelot Woodcarver: a chainsaw-toothed disk that fits on an angle grinder; good for roughing out large areas of the design.
- Grinder: for debarking. Also used for detailed intaglio style designs (etched areas).
- Dremel tool with variable speeds and multiple bits: used for fine work and details such as fur, eyes, etc.
- Sandpaper: from coarse 60 grit, to the finest 320 grit. Sanding is an integral step in achieving a favorable result.
- Double-boiled linseed oil and Watco Danish oil: I find I get good results using these for finishing indoor pieces; however, finish is a personal decision.
- Outdoor sealer with UV and mold protection for finishing and protecting outdoor pieces.

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Carving Found Wood

Finding Your Style

Patience is required when removing the bark. The natural form is concealed and can be damaged if heavy equipment is used. A grinding wheel is ideal for careful debarking.

Consider leaving part of the piece untouched and have the sculpture morph from the rough to the carved and finished piece. Areas of the wood that have been underground or even under water highlight contrasts—creating depth and dimension—and give your sculpture a unique character. A natural finish shows the wood's grain and the colors that are exposed during carving, which make the piece one of a kind.

The Importance of Sanding

The found wood piece can take on a fine-art quality if it is properly sanded. Sanding opens up the wood's pores (exposing the inner wood's hidden characteristics and colors) so that a smooth, flawless finish is achieved. Never underestimate the importance of sanding! In fact, some pieces I have completed have taken approximately 200 hours of sanding.

Second Life For Trees

This program grew from my vision of creating living art and providing historical trees with a "second life". I carve the tree to transform it into a sculpture that represents the natural, cultural and ethnic heritage of a community. My intention is to release the spiritual and ecological characteristics of these venerable trees, thus providing a noble old tree with a noble new life.

If you have never used found wood for carving, the prospect may be intimidating. Face the challenge and explore the endless artistic and creative possibilities it provides you.

Adam Connolly



Scout is an example of a carving that gives new life and purpose to an old tree.

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